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ABSTRACT

This Commission for Higher Education document concerns the approval of the Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology. It opens with the staff recommendation that the Commission approve the Policy, considering the recent technological developments altering distance education environments. The background information section details how both "producers" and "consumers" of instruction are affected by these changes. Campuses are now in positions to offer quality distance education in a cost-effective manner, and a growing number of institutions are providing such services. Students are, in turn, increasingly utilizing distance education because of its improved flexibility and wider range of instructional offerings. The policy in consideration aims to encourage institutions to increase degree opportunities through distance education by streamlining the review process, while at the same time fulfilling the Commission's statutory responsibilities. Included in the document are a copy of the Policy and Guidelines for Distance Education taken from the North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. (YKH)

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ED 416 933

# Policy for Delivering Degree Programs through Distance Education Technology

Indiana Commission for Higher Education

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JC 980 136

**COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**
Friday, March 13, 1998

**DECISION ITEM A:** **Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology**

**Staff Recommendation**

That the Commission for Higher Education approve the *Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology*, March 5, 1998, in accordance with the background discussion in this agenda item.

**Background**

In 1990, the Commission for Higher Education updated its *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals* by clarifying how the policy applied to programs delivered off-campus. Since then, technological developments -- perhaps best exemplified by the development of the Internet -- have dramatically altered the environment for offering degree programs via distance education technology, both for producers and consumers of instruction.

On the production side, all campuses are now in a position to offer quality instruction via distance education technology in an increasingly cost-effective manner. This has led to many more institutions, both in Indiana and out of state, participating in the delivery of distance education degree programs.

Largely through the wide-spread use of the personal computer, consumers or students, on the other hand, are now able to take advantage of distance education opportunities anywhere -- at home, in the office, and even while traveling. As a result of this increased flexibility and the wider instructional offerings that are available, many more students are seeking opportunities to complete degrees via distance education technology.

The attached policy, an earlier version of which was discussed at the Commission's previous meeting in February, is a response to the changing distance education technology environment. Its aim is to encourage institutions to increase opportunities for students to complete a degree program through distance education technology by streamlining the review process, while at the

same time fulfilling the Commission's statutory responsibilities to approve new programs and to coordinate Indiana's system of higher education.

Given that the proposed policy suggests major changes to the way new degree programs are handled, the Commission may wish to reassess the policy's effectiveness after gaining appropriate experience in applying it to new program decisions. In addition, the Commission may also wish to examine in greater detail the state's interests in fee levels established for Indiana residents and non-residents receiving instruction via distance education technology.

If approved, the *Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology* will be regarded as a modification of the existing *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals*.

**Supporting Document**

*Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology*, March 5, 1998

# POLICY FOR DELIVERING DEGREE PROGRAMS

# THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

March 5, 1998

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## *Preamble*

Enormous technological advances have taken place during the decade of the 1990s that have affected, and will continue to affect, the delivery of postsecondary instruction in dramatic ways. As professors in virtually all disciplines increasingly employ technology in teaching courses, the difference between how a faculty member teaches a course for on-campus delivery and how one teaches for off-campus delivery has significantly diminished, if not disappeared altogether, thus making it far easier to reach students anywhere around the world, let alone in the neighboring town or county. Indeed, postsecondary instruction will become increasingly distributed, that is, it will incorporate, through the use of technology, more asysnchronous student-faculty and student-student interaction outside the classroom, irrespective of whether the student is enrolled "on campus" or "off-campus."

In the face of these changes, the instructional marketplace is far more competitive, as Indiana institutions now compete with institutions all over the country that are able to reach Indiana residents through distance education technology. At the same time, Hoosier students have greatly expanded opportunities for pursing coursework and Indiana institutions have the capability for reaching vast new student markets.

The purpose of this policy is to (1) ensure that distant learners have access to the same quality of instruction available on campus, (2) make it easier for campuses to respond quickly to new opportunities for serving students through distance education technology, (3) use taxpayer dollars efficiently, and (4) streamline Commission policies for handling requests to offer degree programs through distance education technology.

## *Policy*

1. This policy applies to all degree programs[1] that are delivered primarily through distance education technology and are available off-campus, that is outside the county in which the campus or postsecondary center that exercises academic responsibility for the degree program is located.

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[1] The Commission's *Policy for Authorizing New Campuses and Off-Campus Sites*, approved in October 1996, already addresses the delivery of courses: "all campuses may offer credit courses throughout the state via mediated instruction, including telecommunications." The Commission's *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals*, approved January 1990, defines a degree program as "a coherent course of study that culminates in the awarding of a specific degree or other recognition of accomplishment. A degree program ... is normally but not always characterized by: (1) a specialized body of knowledge; (2) a faculty-designed curricular path that is chosen as a student's major emphasis of study; (3) an increasing sophistication in curricular content during the student's period of study; (4) certain intended or expected student outcomes; and (5) faculty identification with an organized instructional effort in a subject matter area.

2. As used in this policy, the term "distance education technology" applies to all forms of electronic technologies -- such as the Internet, computer programs, CD-ROMs, video tapes, audio tapes, television, radio -- as well as to degree programs delivered through print correspondence. The term "distance education technology" is understood to be generally synonymous with the term "mediated instruction," with the caveat that "mediated instruction" can also apply to on-campus classroom instruction.

3. As used in this policy, being "available" is understood to mean that:

   a) A student off-campus can complete, through distance education technology, a total of 50 percent or more of the semester credit hours required for the degree program; and

   b) The institution is publicizing to prospective students (through materials prepared by the institution itself, by IHETS, or by the Indiana College Network) or counseling students who are taking courses that they will be able to complete 50 percent or more of the semester credit hours required for the degree program through distance education technology.

4. Degree programs to be delivered through distance education technology must be authorized by the Commission for Higher Education following submission of a program request that has been approved by the institution's board of trustees. If an institution's trustees do not require distance education technology program to be approved by the board, the institution should send a copy of the policy to the Commission.

5. If the degree program to be delivered through distance education technology is presently offered on campus, and if a substantial number of the semester credit hours required for the degree will be delivered through distance education technology, with very few hours delivered by using off-campus faculty, (for example, 90 percent through technology, 10 percent by off-campus faculty or 80 percent through technology, 20 percent by students coming on campus), the program request will be on the Commission agenda for action within 60 days of submitting the proposal, provided:

   a) The on-campus degree program has a reasonably successful history of enrollments and degrees conferred in recent years;

   b) The off-campus proposal does not require significant state funds to deliver off-campus; and

   c) The following information is included in the off-campus degree program request (this information should be submitted instead of the standard new program proposal):

      i) Table 1 (projections of student enrollments and degrees conferred) from *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals*, as it applies to the off-campus offering only;

ii) The mix of technologies[3] used to deliver the coursework (with the understanding that the mix may change over time), and whether the choice of technology allows for unrestricted access to the instruction or restricted access through a limited point-to-point delivery mechanism, in which case the specific delivery sites should be identified;

iii) A schedule for delivering required and elective courses in the major (for graduate programs, all courses are considered to be "in the major") as well as an indication of how students will be able to meet other degree requirements (for example, general education courses, cognitive areas, minors), along with an indication of the minimum time required for a student to complete the degree program;

iv) An indication that the curriculum for the off-campus degree program will be the same as the on-campus curriculum or a description of how the curricula differ;

v) A description of how student learning will be assessed and how student support services will be made available to distant learners;

vi) The fees charged to off-campus students; and

vii) A description of how any significant state resources will be used to deliver the degree program (including Table 2 from *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals*, as it applies to the off-campus offering only).

6. If the degree program to be delivered through distance education technology is presently not offered on campus, or if the program will not be delivered substantially through distance education technology, the standard *Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Developing New Academic Program Proposals* should be followed.

7. For degree programs delivered through distance education technology, the standard Commission authorization will extend to all 92 counties of the state. The Commission recognizes that an institution may not be able to offer a degree program in all 92 counties due to technology limitations or may choose, for other reasons, to offer a degree program in fewer than 92 counties.

8. Program duplication will not be a factor that the Commission will consider in authorizing degree programs delivered through distance education technology.

9. Fees charged to non-Indiana residents enrolled in degree programs delivered through distance education technology will not be lower than fees charged to Indiana residents.

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[3] If IHETS and INTELENET represent suitable options for delivering a program to an intended audience, and an institution contemplates using an alternative option, the institution needs to explain its rationale to the Commission.

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10. If IHETS and INTELENET represent suitable options for delivering a degree program to an intended audience, and an institution opts to use an alternative option, the institution needs to provide to the Commission its rationale.

11. Institutions will report all students enrolled in degree programs delivered through distance education technology as part of their SIS submission and in accordance with the Commission's *Student Information System Instructions*.

12. By June 1, 1998, each institution will describe to the Commission the process it will use to review off-campus degree programs delivered through distance education technology on a regular basis. The description should include the timetable for reviewing degree programs and the enrollment/graduation criteria to be used in determining whether the distance education technology option should be continued. Any significant changes to the review process should be reported to the Commission.

13. The Commission for Higher Education and the institutions will adopt and follow the *Guidelines for Distance Education*, which have been adopted by the six regional accrediting bodies, including the North Central Association, and which are based on an extension of the *Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs* developed by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE).

14. By March 15 of each year, each institution will report to the Commission what degree programs the institution intends to develop for delivery via distance education technology during the next two years. The Commission will then convene the institutions to consider how they might coordinate their plans. No Commission action will be taken in conjunction with these discussions.

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# Guidelines for Distance Education

In order to facilitate the evaluation of distance education throughout the United States, the regional accrediting associations have agreed upon the following definition and guidelines. This agreement is based on an extension of the Principles developed by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE).

## DEFINITION:

**Distance education** is defined, for the purposes of accreditation review, as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

## GUIDELINES:

Any institution offering distance education is expected to meet the requirements of its own regional accrediting body, and be guided by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) Principles. In addition, an institution is expected to address, in its self-studies and/or proposals for institutional change, the following expectations, which it can anticipate will be reviewed by its regional accrediting commission.

### *Curriculum and Instruction*

- Programs provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty, and among students.
- The institution's faculty assumes responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.
- The institution ensures that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs.
- The institution ensures the currency of materials, programs, and courses.
- The institution's distance education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from

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the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products.

- The institution provides appropriate faculty support services specifically related to distance education.
- The institution provides appropriate training for faculty who teach in distance education programs.

***Evaluation and Assessment***

- The institution assesses student capability to succeed in distance education programs and applies this information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions.
- The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to campus-based programs.
- The institution ensures the integrity of student work and the credibility of the degrees and credits it awards.

***Library and Learning Resources***

- The institution ensures that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources.
- The institution monitors whether students make appropriate use of learning resources
- The institution provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs.

***Student Services***

- The institution provides adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programs, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, and placement and counseling.
- The institution provides an adequate means for resolving student complaints.
- The institution provides to students advertising, recruiting, and admissions information that adequately and accurately represents the programs, requirements, and services available.
- The institution ensures that students admitted possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology

employed in the program, and provides aid to students who are experiencing difficulty using the required technology.

### *Facilities and Finances*

- The institution possesses the equipment and technical expertise required for distance education.
- The institution's long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education program.

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